

# PEOPLE & THINGS

**A**PPARENTLY it was the love of sport that caused Vladimir Petrov, the Soviet spy, to forsake the straight and narrow path of Communism.

He must have been infected with the dread virus long before he went to Canberra from the M.W.D. Espionage School in Leningrad because, shortly after his arrival, he started shyly frequenting the Canberra Chess Club. The fever caught hold. He tried to assuage it with hiking, then with trout-fishing in the mountain streams; then he turned to rough shooting. Still he craved for more.

His doom was sealed when he saw a football match between the English tourists and an Australian team in 1952. From that day every Saturday saw him at one football match or another. The next steps in his downfall were truly horrifying. He started taking his wife to the cinema, bought a dog and a cat, upon which he lavished diversionist affection, and in the last stages of the addiction he even started to dress like an Englishman.

Presumably his colleagues at the Embassy assumed that this terrible metamorphosis was a brilliant disguise, and it was only when his three-year term was up and he was due to leave the Western football fields for ever that they realised that the Western mask which Petrov wore was not a mask. It was the true face of Petrov the sports fan.

## Double Dealing

**H**ERE is a true tale of rascality in the O'Henry tradition. Mr. Nemo, a world famous author, received a pathetic letter from an unknown American saying that all his life he had been collecting the first editions of Nemo's works in order to present them to his dear old Alma Mater. Would Mr. Nemo be very kind and autograph them. Touched and flattered, Mr. Nemo agreed. A few days later an American bookseller, visiting London, telephoned Mr. Nemo's secretary.

"Does Mr. Nemo ever autograph sets of his first editions?"

"Never until the other day when he signed a set for a compatriot of yours, a Mr. Nihil, who said he wanted to present them to his Alma Mater."

There was an explosion at the other end of the telephone. "Nihil did you say? Don't you know that so-and-so's my biggest competitor

## By ATTICUS

in the rare book trade? And I've just bought that set from him for a fabulous price. Alma Mater indeed! Why that man hasn't even got an Alma Pater."

## Portrait of the Artist

**I**N recent times the tyranny of the portrait-painter has been absolute. Whistler and Sargent set the tone; Cézanne with his scores of sittings turned the whole business into a test of endurance, and the tradition continues—so much so, that within living memory a King of England is reported to have used the words, "Another sitting? I'd rather abdicate!"

Just occasionally, however, the world takes its revenge. I was amused to notice in a Davies Street antique shop this Rockingham



figure in which the great sculptor Nollekens, depicted as an ape, was repaid for a lifetime of rudeness. Nollekens was mean beyond all endurance—he kept his coffee beans for forty years and smuggled silk stockings into England by stuffing them into his busts. He was physically revolting, and he so far abused the sculptor-sitter relationship as to inform one modest married lady that "there is no bosom worth looking at after the age of eighteen."

## So Much for Elgar

**S**IR THOMAS BEECHAM'S seventy-fifth birthday on April 29 will not, as far as I know, be celebrated in the concert hall; but I shall be surprised if there is not an unusually affectionate demonstration when he appears at the Royal Festival Hall next Saturday evening.

I was startled, though, to notice that he has included the Enigma Variations in next Saturday's programme, for Sir Thomas has never been an Elgarian. On one occasion, when Sir Thomas was discoursing in lapidary style on the merits of Delius, Bantock and others, one of his listeners interrupted with "What about Elgar, Sir Thomas?"

"How do you mean, my dear fellow?" said Sir Thomas. "What about Elgar? Isn't he well?"

## Authors v. Publishers

**I** HOPE the dispute between authors and publishers on the question of film, dramatic and broadcasting rights in books will come to a head around June 9, which is the date of the annual cricket match between these ancient enemies. It would be a

pity if this battle of the bookrights were confined to the letter columns of "The Times" where a truly majestic team of authors has just opened the bowling. And in the past these cricket matches have been far too light-hearted, clearly not reflecting the traditionally bitter feelings that have always existed between the idle scribblers and their hard-faced exploiters. It is time for truth and body-line. After all Mr. Gilbert Harding will, I learn, be present on June 9 to see that nobody gets really hurt.

## Cormorant-Fishing

**F**OR the benefit of those who are interested in fishing with captive cormorants, I have obtained authentic details from the cradle of this art which is the little port of Gifu, about 120 miles south of Tokyo.

Cormorant-fishing is done at night and the boat carries on a pole an iron basket of burning wood which attracts the fish. Each fishing boat tows ten cormorants at the end of long lines tied snugly but not painfully round their necks. When the fish come to the light the cormorants dive and catch them, but being unable to swallow the fish they are pulled to the boat and relieved of their catch.

## Compleat Angling

**T**HE approximate weight of each fish is one pound, and during the night the average catch per bird is between thirty and forty fish, which get high prices in the markets because the marks in the bird's beak indicate that they are fresh.

Towards dawn the cormorants are lifted into the boat and rewarded with as much fish as they can eat, after which they are placed, in order of seniority, in the prow of the boat. They are said to be very resentful if placed in the wrong precedence according to age, which runs up to twelve (when the birds are retired).

The sport has become a tourist attraction at Gifu, and the more progressive of the cormorant fishers carry a super-cargo of saki and geisha girls.

## First Blood to "Punch"

**T**HE brilliant lampoon of "The New Yorker" in the spring issue of "Punch," in which I seem to detect the pencil of Mr. Norman Mansbridge and the ballpoint of Mr. Anthony Powell, has, I learn, keenly tickled "The New Yorker" staff, and I expect it will not be long before there is a sizzling counter-attack.

The visit of Mr. Malcolm Muggeridge, the editor, to America last week coincided with the arrival of "Punch," and the Star Chamber of "The New Yorker" entertained him to a caviar and champagne banquet at the Pavillion Restaurant. I hope this unseemly fraternisation will prove to be in the same category as those Christmas Day games of football between the lines in the first world war.

## The Burning Topic

**T**HERE was an urgent telephone call for the chairman of an American cigarette company. It was the professor in charge of the research laboratory. His voice was full of gloom.

"Bad news."

"Good heavens, man. What is it?"

"We've definitely established that smoking is bad for mice."